

It took us three weeks before we got back out to Mystery Cave again. Our attitudes have changed a bit since we first started the project. In the beginning we looked at the whole thing as a fun adventure. Since the last trip out we found ourselves taking a more serious approach. On the drive out this time our conversation was a little more subdued than before. We hadn't talked much since the last trip (not for any reason but scheduling conflicts). Instead of discussing ways of getting through the passage, we found ourselves talking about rational explanations for what had happened. Neither one of us had any ideas that would explain the unusual occurrences we experienced on the last trip. We were amused to find out that neither one of us had talked much about the last trip to other people. That is a complete reversal from the other trips. It has been fun to report to friends and family about our progress. It is always fun to tell people about the tight squeeze we are going to have to go through to get into the passage. Most people have little desire to voluntarily subject themselves to incredibly tight places. Actually neither do I, but I will do it in order to get to the other side. Good motivation.

We left town early in the afternoon to beat traffic. I don't really recall what time we finally got to the cave. Like I said, the mood was subdued. We got rigged up and started down. Obviously B left the dog home this time. We took essentially the same gear as the last time. We left some of the tools in the hole to save our backs the agony of hauling the extra weight. Even with the gear we got down in good time. We really have a good system for getting up and down. There was only one minor mishap this trip. B scraped his arm on the descent. Not real bad, fortunately. He waited until we got all the way to the hole to patch it up. It was just a superficial cut. While he was getting the wound cleaned up I started working. We both took note that the breeze was back and the rumbling present. We had four fresh batteries and four (or maybe 3 1/2) fresh arms. I had high hopes this would be the day. It started out pretty slow. When we first started working on the hole the thickness was about 3 inches. As we have enlarged the hole the thickness has increased. As a result our progress has become slower. Still, we continued with as much energy as we could put into the work. The hole was big enough, at least, for me

to put the hammer into the hole for reference, then put the camera into the hole and take a picture of Floyd's Tomb.

It's been nice to see the pile of broken rock below the hole get bigger and bigger. We have both realized that we are just going to have to put in a certain amount of work in order to get through, so we just get down to business. We don't usually talk much while we work, since one of us is making a lot of noise with the drill or hammer. Break times are used to chat momentarily about what ever topic pops into mind. The breaks take place whenever the guy that's working decides to switch roles. We both put in some pretty good work sessions. I have a little more stamina than B, but he gets just as much done in a shorter amount of time, due to his upper body strength. We still celebrate the small victories we encounter along the way. Whenever a section we've been working on crumbles, we cheer. On the rare occasion that a fist-size rock falls from the entrance, we whoop and holler. That's one small chunk of earth that no longer separates us from... whatever lies on the other side. I still harbor the fantasy that there is a hidden entrance to the other side of the passage and years ago Spanish explorers hid their treasures in the cave and sealed up the entrance. And it has remained untouched until we find it! B has a more realistic, although more mundane theory. He figures there is more cave on the other side. We'll see who is right.

This trip out I wanted to see if we could speed up the work by using larger masonry bits. I purchased some good sized ones at the hardware store (at a good sized price). One was larger in diameter than all the rest. The other was smaller around, but longer. I had pretty much concluded that the big one might be too big, and I was right. We tried to get it to go into the rock but progress was very slow. We tried pushing for all we were worth and all we got was tired. The larger bit just created too much friction area for our strength. It might have worked with a hammer-drill, but we didn't have one. The longer bit worked fine with our drill. We relied on it for most of the work we did this trip. I thought we were going to be out one bit, and a drill and my hand, when the bit broke off toward one end. I was pushing as hard as I could on the drill with the bit a few inches in the wall, when it

snapped. I nearly rammed the drill through the wall from pushing so hard. We were able to retrieve the bit and keep using it, minus a couple inches. It still worked great. Only once in a great while did we resort to hammer and chisel. Work was proceeding as normal, until about the time we were on our fourth battery.

I was kneeling down and working the drill slowly into the wall at the time. I had my ear plugs in, my safety glasses on, and was lost in my own thoughts. Suddenly, over the squeal of the drill wearing down the rock, I heard a strange noise. It was loud. I could hear it over the noise of the drill, even though I had the ear plugs in. At first I thought it was just the drill bit doing its job on the cave. It would frequently complain by screeching and whining as we forced it into the wall. But this was different. It took me several full seconds to comprehend that this was coming from inside the hole, and not the bit. I stopped drilling and yanked my earplugs out just in time to hear the most terrible scream I have ever heard trail off and echo into the darkness of the cavern. I stared wide-eyed at the hole. For several moments I didn't move, nor did I breathe. I turned to look at B. Moments earlier he had been lying on the rope bag catching a nap. Now, he was standing upright, mouth open, with a look of concern on his face! I turned and looked into the hole again, half expecting to see a demon face staring back at me. Nothing was different in Floyd's Tomb. I fixed my gaze on the back of the squeeze, where the limits of my light reached. There was no motion, only darkness beyond the reaches of my light. In the complete silence that followed I could hear my heart pounding in my ears. Not another sound could be heard in the cave. Suddenly I heard a scraping noise behind me and straightened up. I nearly knocked myself out hitting my head on the overhang. It was just B moving to turn on his light but I was so wired it nearly sent me to my grave. B spoke and again I jumped. He said to get some rocks and put them into the hole. He explained that whatever animal had made that noise might be able to get through the hole. I immediately grabbed a few rocks and hoisted them through the opening. Using the handle of the sledge hammer I slid the rocks as far back into the tunnel as I could reach, creating a wall between us and the other side. Since the squeeze is so small it didn't take long. The entire time I was

doing this, however, I was thinking that the noise certainly did not come from an animal! I didn't know if B really thought it was, or if he was just trying to convince himself. I didn't say anything to him about what I thought.

From the time it happened, to the writing of this journal entry (two days later) I have tried to come up with some possible source for such a noise. To describe it I would say it sounded like a cross between a man screaming in fear, and a cougar screaming in pain. It sounded like it came from the hole and was roughly 100 feet away. The horrific noise reverberated through the cave, and through my ears. B estimated the scream lasted 8-10 seconds. My best guess is about 5 seconds. (3 seconds while I was drilling, one and 1/2 seconds to drop the drill and yank the ear plugs, and 1/2 second of shear terror) It's difficult to tell how much time passes when you're listening to a solo from the depths of Hades.

After I filled the back of the passage with rocks we just sat there listening to the silence. My breathing was a lot more rapid than usual. Neither of us spoke for quite some time. Finally B suggested we get back to work, but keep an eye out for movement in the hole. We put a light in the passage that shined to the back of Floyd's Tomb. It was only at this point that we realized the wind had stopped again and the rumbling could no longer be heard. To say I was nervous would be an understatement. I didn't say anything to B, nor him to me. Back to the drilling. B took over the work, which was fine with me. I wasn't exactly worn out, but I didn't mind being further from the hole. B would stop from time to time and listen. I just sat, watching him, with my light on. I wasn't close to the entrance to the hole, but I still found myself looking behind me down the passage to the still water. Every time my light would cast an unusual shadow my heart would jump. My imagination was running wild. Oddly, B seemed to be less concerned about the strange noise than me. After a short time he seemed to be focused entirely on getting through the passage. I was still straining to listen above the sound of the drill. I heard nothing but the now familiar sound of carbide on stone. As I contemplated the possible scenarios which might play out on the other side of the passage I found myself strangely

getting somewhat excited again about getting through. It might have been fatigue taking its toll on my mind. Or the thought of something valuable on the other side.

My thoughts were broken when B let out a yell. Possibly a cuss word. He said the drill battery was dying, but he hadn't quite broken off a large (relative) section he was working on. He set the useless drill aside and picked up a hammer and bullpin. He started wailing away at the hole created by the bit. After nearly ten solid minutes of hammering he sat back against the rock, sweating and nearly out of breath. The bullpin was still protruding from the cave wall. He held the hammer toward me, inviting me to take a few swings. I held up my hand and shook my head. I had been ready to exit this cave for quite awhile now. He didn't press the issue, and without speaking we both started gathering the gear we were going to take out. Once again we stashed some of the tools in the passage. I was first to start toward the top of the cave. Several times I had to stop and wait for B. Not because he was moving slow. I was just more than eager to get out. Few times have I felt better than that night, stepping out into the chilly night air.

*My journal talks about the rest of the evening: Our dinner, our decision to get a motel and come back the next day, our lengthy discussion on the strange sounds we had heard, another mediocre night's sleep. I CANNOT believe that we were so willing to get right back into the cave after hearing the scream. Part of the reason I went along with the idea was because B seemed so indifferent to any possible dangers. Even if it were an animal (which I did not believe, but could offer no better explanation), weren't we possibly putting ourselves in harms way? In retrospect I still have difficulty understanding our thought process at that time. We were just too eager to discover virgin cave passages. I now think it can be summed up with one word: testosterone!*